

IN BRIEF

SHOW DISCUSSES SECONDHAND SMOKE AND ITS RISK TO ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

Antismoking group ClearWay Minnesota has created a television show about secondhand smoke and its health risks, especially among ethnic communities in Minnesota.

The show, "Secondhand Smoke in Our Communities," will air on public television eight times, each time featuring a different language, starting on Jan. 15. The show was produced in collaboration with ECHO Minnesota, a nonprofit media group that addresses health and safety issues among immigrant and refugee populations in the state. The program will be broadcast in English, Spanish, Hmong, Somali, Karen, Vietnamese, Lao, and Khmer.

Officials with ClearWay say ethnic and low-income populations face a disproportionate risk from the dangers of secondhand smoke. "Secondhand smoke is harmful to all Minnesotans' health, but diverse communities experience some of the greatest harm," says David Willoughby, CEO of ClearWay Minnesota. "Tobacco companies use clever marketing practices to make their dangerous products attractive to these communities. This program offers a distinct way to tell the story of tobacco's impact in all Minnesota and to educate

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People Incorporated Expands to Cover Mental Health Services for Children

A mental health nonprofit that formerly served only adult clients will expand its operations to cover children's mental health services. People Incorporated Mental Health Services, based in St. Paul, announced Jan. 1 that it has acquired the children's mental health services of Children's Home Society and Family Services (Children's Home), also of St. Paul.

Officials say the Children's Home services will continue without disruption in the six-county metro area. The program currently serves approximately 1,000 clients. "This move combines People Incorporated's long history of managing and growing programs for people with mental health needs with the expertise Children's Home has working with children," says Tim Burkett, PhD, People Incorporated's CEO. "We'll use this acquisition as a springboard to develop innovative early intervention programs for children and families—a critical area."

The People Incorporated Children's Services division will offer individual and family counseling, early childhood mental health, school-linked counseling, day treatment for children, domestic abuse prevention, anger management, and parent support services.

Jill Wiedemann-West, COO of People Incorporated, says the acquisition follows a trend of consolidation among nonprofits. "Small nonprofits are finding it harder to make diversified services work in the harsh economy. This acquisition allows each organization to focus on its specialty services, but more efficiently."

The Children's Home acquisition will add approximately \$3.8 million to People Incorporated's 2012 budget of \$33.5 million, officials say.

Cancer Rates Continue to Decline, According to ACS Report

Cancer mortality rates continue to decline both nationally and in Minnesota, according to new data from the American Cancer Society (ACS).

The group's annual cancer statistics report shows that between 2004 and 2008, cancer death rates decreased by 1.8 percent per year in men and by 1.6 percent per year in women. Overall cancer incidence rates for men have also declined, by 0.6 percent per year nationally. Cancer incidence rates in women were stable during those four years.

The incidence and mortality rates for cancer in Minnesota have shown similar declines in recent years, officials with the Minnesota chapter of ACS say. The overall cancer mortality rate in Minnesota decreased by 1.6 percent a year between 2000 and 2007. After adjusting for population growth and aging, the over-



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Editor: **Scott Wooldridge**

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the specific populations that are most at risk.”

ClearWay officials estimate that tobacco companies spent nearly \$200 million marketing tobacco products in Minnesota in 2008. They note that tobacco use among some ethnic communities is outpacing the rates of tobacco use among the general population.

“Tobacco’s impact and health risks do not discriminate—but tobacco companies’ marketing efforts do,” Willoughby says. “We need to continue strong public policy efforts together with tobacco prevention and smoking cessation services in the communities targeted most by tobacco companies. Partnering with ECHO Minnesota provides an invaluable opportunity to protect the health of all Minnesotans.”

WALGREENS, EXPRESS SCRIPTS STALEMATED IN CONTRACT DISPUTE

A contract dispute has resulted in a change for Walgreens customers who use Express Scripts as their pharmacy benefits management company. The inability of the two companies to reach an agreement means that people with prescription drug coverage plans through Express Scripts will not be covered for prescriptions purchased at Walgreens stores.

The change went into place Jan. 1. Although most large health plans in the state do not work with Express Scripts, the change could still affect a significant number of Minnesotans.

Walgreens released a statement saying the company would offer discounts to Express Scripts enrollees in an effort to keep their business. “We apologize to our patients for the disruption caused by Express Scripts’ stance and are offering a discount in the cost of

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all cancer mortality rate in Minnesota was 15 percent lower in 2007 than it was 20 years earlier, with cancer mortality declining 17 percent in men and 15 percent among women.

According to Lou Harvin, public relations manager for the Minnesota chapter of ACS, although it takes time to collect data for cancer illness and death, improving trend lines have been consistent. He says that better treatments have played a role, along with improved screening rates for cancer. “People are better about talking to their doctors about screening,” he says.

Harvin notes that one reason that men’s incidence and death rates have declined more than those for women is that men are quitting smoking at higher rates than women. “Women have been slower to give up smoking; men have been dropping the cigarette habit at a faster rate,” he says.

However, the data show that cancer remains the No.1 killer of Minnesotans. The report estimates that in this state, cancer will account for more than 9,000 deaths in 2012.

Harvin says that although the ongoing reduction in smoking among the general population is making significant improvement in cancer numbers, other health trends could reverse the gains that anticancer groups have been seeing. “We continue to see Americans and Minnesotans becoming more overweight and obese,” he says. “We know that one-third of cancers are directly related to nutrition, exercise, and general eating habits. There is a good chance that 10 years from now, we could see these numbers going backward.”

The key for the general public, Harvin says, is making good decisions on what to put into your body. “You take care of yourself, and you can reduce your risk of getting cancer,” he says.

Another area of concern is the racial and ethnic disparities seen in cancer incidence and mortality rates. In Minnesota, the cancer society data show that African American men have a 13 percent higher cancer incidence rate than non-Hispanic white men and a 42 percent higher mortality rate. In addition, once diagnosed with cancer, African Americans have poorer five-year survival rates than whites for nearly every type of cancer.

Harvin says that more than ethnicity, socioeconomic factors are playing a role in these findings. “It’s not really about the race of the person, it’s more about access to health care,” he says.

Youth Sports Not Enough to Keep Weight Down, U of M Study Finds

A study from the University of Minnesota says that participating in sports may not be enough to keep young people from becoming overweight.

Researchers with the U of M’s School of Public Health, along with researchers from university’s Medical School and School of Kinesiology, found that nearly half the adolescents ages 12 to 17 who are overweight participate in organized sports.

“Youth sport is encouraged as a way to help curb the obesity epidemic among young people, but the results of our review show that the activity alone might not



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enrolling in our Prescription Savings Club," says Walgreens' President of Pharmacy, Health and Wellness Solutions and Services Kermit Crawford. The company's Prescription Savings Club is an existing discount program that has 2,000 enrollees nationwide.

Express Scripts is encouraging enrollees to move to different pharmacies, saying that the Walgreens contract proposal would raise premiums overall for enrollees.

MDA MARKS 10 YEARS OF "GIVE KIDS A SMILE"

The Minnesota Dental Association (MDA) is promoting its annual Give Kids a Smile program, which will provide free dental care to children across the state on Feb. 3-4.

Officials with the Minneapolis-based group say an estimated 6,000 children will participate in this year's program. This is the 10th straight year Give Kids a Smile has been sponsored by MDA, and it has provided more than \$13.5 million in services to nearly 45,000 children during that time.

Officials say access to dental care remains a major problem for young people in the state. "We know that the joy and personality of a child is expressed through a smile, but untreated dental problems cause many children to hide their smiles," says Michael Zakula, DDS, MDA president and a practicing orthodontist in Hibbing. "Sadly, tooth decay remains the number one disease in children and the barriers to care that caused us to start this program 10 years ago remain."

More information on the program can be found at www.mndental.org.

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be enough to prevent extra weight gain," says School of Public Health researcher Toben Nelson, ScD, assistant professor within the Division of Epidemiology & Community Health. "The fact that many studies show that sport participants are as likely as non-participants to be overweight is interesting because studies consistently show that participants are more likely to be physically active."

The researchers say a high-calorie diet may be canceling out the benefits of exercise. They found that youth sports participants consume more fast food and sugar-sweetened beverages than nonparticipating young people. The sports settings themselves often offer many unhealthy food options, the researchers note.

Mayo Studies Look Role of Hepatitis C In Rising Liver Cancer Rates

Two recent studies by Mayo Clinic scientists give new insights into the causes of liver cancer and how many people it affects.

Rates of incidence for liver cancers, also known as hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), have been on the rise for years, with incidence rates for HCC tripling over the past three decades, but the reason for the increase has remained a mystery.

In a study led by Mayo investigator W. Ray Kim, MD, researchers found the overall incidence of HCC in the population (6.9 per 100,000) is higher than has been estimated for the nation, based on data from the National Cancer Institute (5.1 per 100,000). The study also found that HCC, which two decades ago tended to be caused by liver-scarring diseases such as cirrhosis from alcohol consumption, is now occurring as a consequence of hepatitis C infection.

"The liver scarring from hepatitis C can take 20 to 30 years to develop into cancer," Dr. Kim says. "We're now seeing cancer patients in their 50s and 60s who contracted hepatitis C 30 years ago and didn't even know they were infected."

In addition, researchers found that increased rates of obesity could be affecting rates of HCC incidence. Kim's study found that 11 percent of HCC cases were linked to obesity, in particular, fatty liver disease.

"It's a small percentage of cases overall," Dr. Kim says. "But with the nationwide obesity epidemic, we believe the rates of liver cancer may dramatically increase in the foreseeable future."

The second Mayo Clinic study looked exclusively at the Somali population, which is growing in the U.S., particularly in Minnesota, where as many as 50,000 Somalis have settled in the last two decades. The East African country is known to have a high prevalence of hepatitis B, a risk factor for HCC.

Researchers also found a significant percentage of liver cancer cases in the population that were attributable to hepatitis C, which had not been known to be significantly prevalent.

"The study suggests that screening for hepatitis C would be helpful for the Somali population and would enable close surveillance of liver cancer among those at risk," says Abdirashid Shire, PhD, a Mayo Clinic researcher. "That would greatly improve treatment and survival of Somalis with this type of cancer."



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